

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2448

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 4455

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FOR AMBASSADOR JORDEN; ARA/PAN; S/AB

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PN
SUBJECT: THE NEGOTIATIONS, THE EMBASSY AND THE "OPPOSITION"

1. THE MOST RECENT CONVERSATION BETWEEN POLITICAL COUNSELOR TAYLOR AND ANYONE WHO COULD REMOTELY BE CONSIDERED "OPPOSITION" HERE WAS HELD ON MAY 9--MORE THAN FIVE WEEKS AGO. A BRIEF MEMORANDUM OF THAT CONVERSATION WAS SENT TO ARA/PAN AND INR/RAR-LAMPERT. THE PARTICIPANTS WERE DAVID SAMUDIO, SR., THE LIBERAL PARTY'S 1968 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, AND FIVE OTHER PANAMANIAN--MOSTLY LIBERALS--PLUS TAYLOR AND POLITICAL OFFICER STEPHEN MAY. THE EMBASSY HAS DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS MAINTAINED CONTACT WITH THE LIBERALS AND OTHER OPPOSITIONISTS THROUGH MAY. THE MAY 9 CONVERSATION--OVER LUNCH AT SAMUDIO'S APARTMENT--WAS AT SAMUDIO'S REQUEST.

2. THE CONVERSATION WAS UNEXCEPTIONAL, EXCEPT THAT ONE PANAMANIAN URGED THE U.S. TO SIGN A JUST TREATY WITH THE CURRENT PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT; THIS DREW NO DEMURRER FROM THE OTHERS. (A COMMONER LINE AMONG THE FORMER POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVISTS--NOT RAISED IN THIS MEETING-- IS CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT TORRIJOS SHOULD NOT RPT NOT BE GIVEN A TREATY, SINCE THAT WOULD STRENGTHEN HIS DICTATORIAL HOLD ON POWER.)

3. AT ONE POINT, ONE OF THE PANAMANIAN ASKED TAYLOR WHETHER HE THOUGHT TORRIJOS WANTED A TREATY. TAYLOR REPLIED THAT HE DID RPT DID THINK TORRIJOS WANTED A TREATY, BUT IT REMAINED TO BE SEEN WHETHER TORRIJOS

WAS PREPARED TO ACCEPT A TREATY THAT WAS POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND CONGRESS. ESCOBAR'S REMARKS MAY HAVE RESULTED FROM A DISTORTION OF THIS COMMENT. IF NOT, NEITHER TAYLOR NOR MAY CAN FIGURE OUT WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT. IF ANY NATIONAL GUARD OFFICERS OTHER THAN TORRIJOS WERE MENTIONED, NEITHER MAY NOR TAYLOR CAN RECALL IT. WE HAVE LITTLE KNOWLEDGE OF THE VIEWS OF PAREDES AND NORIEGA AND WOULD NOT HAVE COMMENTED ON THEM IN ANY CASE.

4. ABOUT TWO WEEKS AFTER THIS LUNCH, TAYLOR WAS TALKING OVER THE PHONE WITH PANAMANIAN NEGOTIATOR CARLOS LOPEZ GUEVARA WHEN THE LATTER ASKED, "HOW WAS YOUR MEETING WITH THE OPPOSITION PEOPLE?" TAYLOR PUT HIM OFF, AND LOPEZ GUEVARA DID NOT RAISE THE MATTER IN SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATIONS.

5. TAYLOR HAS SPOKEN WITH OPPOSITIONISTS ON FOUR EARLIER OCCASIONS SINCE HIS ARRIVAL IN PANAMA LAST JULY. WE BELIEVE IT UNLIKELY ESCOBAR COULD HAVE BEEN REFERRING TO ANY OF THESE EARLIER SESSIONS. IN ANY EVENT, AT NO TIME DID HE MAKE THE REMARKS ATTRIBUTED TO HIM BY ESCOBAR.

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